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UNITED STATES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ROSA L. DeLAURO

3RD DISTRICT, CONNECTICUT

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AGRICULTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT,
FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION,
AND RELATED AGENCIES

May 22, 2017

The Honorable Alexander Acosta
Secretary of Labor
United States Department of Labor
200 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20210

Dear Secretary Acosta,

I write to urge your agency to take action to improve labor conditions facing workers in the garment industry within the United States. I strongly urge the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and Wage and Hour divisions at the Department of Labor to promptly investigate the industry's labor practices and policies to determine whether any violations of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 or the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 have occurred.

While the garment manufacturing industry has declined overall since the 1960s, we are experiencing increased demand for American-based garment factories. Nearly a third of manufacturers were considering reopening facilities in the United States and 15 percent already had according for a MIT Forum survey for Supply Chain Innovation and Supply Chain Digest. As we trend forward in this direction, we must protect the thousands of garment industry workers from exploitation from employers who fail to adhere to workplace safety standards or abide by laws that ensure workers are compensated fairly for an honest day's work.

According to a report published last year by UCLA-COSH and Garment Worker Center specific to the Los Angeles fashion industry, 50 percent of workers surveyed cited poor ventilation, and eye and nose irritation from chemicals. The report found that a third of these workers did not have access to clean drinking water and pointed to several unsanitary and hazardous workplace conditions, including 80 percent of these workers who indicated they did not receive health and safety training, and nearly half of these workers had no access to first aid when injured. While the majority of this industry is concentrated in New York City and Los Angeles, it is important to assess other localities where this is taking place across the United States.

In addition, wage and hour violations pose a serious and growing problem for working Americans across industries, and wage theft disproportionately affects low-wage, hourly workers. A survey conducted by the National Employer Law Project in 2008 found that 71 percent of the apparel and textile factory workers in Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York City reported overtime violations and 42.6 percent reported minimum wage violations. Piece-rate practices commonly in the garment industry, exacerbates the problem with workers reporting more than double the rate of minimum wage violations than workers receiving an hourly wage according to a 2014 Verite report.

Recent media reports reinforce the data. In the Washington Post Article, *The Hidden Cost of Made-in-America Retail Bargains*, one garment worker alleged he worked for \$5 dollars an hour for a 45 hour workweek while his employer reported a 21 hour workweek. This accusation and others cited are in direct contradiction to federal wage and hour law, as defined in the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, depriving workers of the wages and earnings to which they are legally entitled.

I urge you to utilize your agency's tools to determine if employees' rights are being violated. I believe the Department of Labor's assessment will help ensure that employees are paid the workplace conditions and wages they are entitled to according to federal law and will help eliminate egregious practices in the workplace.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rosa L. DeLauro". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Rosa" and last name "DeLauro" clearly legible.

ROSA L. DeLAURO
Member of Congress